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Summary record of the 13th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Wenaweser ..... (Liechtenstein)
later: Ms. Leyton (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Chile)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 102: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/57/3, A/57/38 (Part I), A/57/125, A/57/129-E/2002/77, A/57/169, 170, 171, 330 and Add.1, 406, 432 and 447)

Agenda item 103: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*) (A/57/3 and 286)

1. **Ms. Pulido** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the advancement of women and gender equality remained issues of critical importance, and the Group of 77 and China were fully committed to the goals and objectives agreed both at the Beijing Conference and at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Despite the progress achieved, however, serious obstacles remained.

2. Poverty eradication remained a challenge, and one of the most disturbing trends in globalization had been the increase in poverty among women. The Beijing Platform for Action had included the empowerment of women as a critical factor in the eradication of poverty, and the Monterrey Consensus adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development had also recognized that promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women was an effective means of ensuring sustainable development. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing also reaffirmed the commitment of Governments to gender equality.

3. Gender mainstreaming in all United Nations programmes was reviewed in the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (A/57/286), and the Group of 77 and China welcomed the system-wide cooperation as part of the strategy for the advancement of women. The mobilization of financial and human resources, both at the national and the international levels, remained essential to the success of the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and the twenty-third special session, and the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product allocated for official development assistance should therefore be met.

4. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the work of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and had made repeated efforts to ensure its survival. Having reviewed the report of the Working Group on the Future Operations of INSTRAW (A/57/330 and Add.1), they believed that the recommendations it contained were essential to the long-term viability of the Institute. They called on all delegations to give serious consideration to that question. It would be contradictory to close the Institute, the only United Nations body devoted to research and training on the advancement of women, precisely when that issue was among the priorities of the international community.

5. **Mr. Padilla Tonos** (Dominican Republic) said that his delegation, having reviewed the report of the Working Group on the Future Operations of INSTRAW, agreed with its conclusion that the Institute could make a substantive contribution to the advancement of women within the United Nations system, if it were able to reform its structure and revitalize its activities with sufficient financial and human resources to fulfil its mandate. In the view of the Working Group, closing a United Nations office located in a developing country would send the wrong signal, and, at a juncture when gender issues were at the top of the United Nations agenda, it would be inconsistent to close the only United Nations institute devoted to those questions.

6. The Working Group had made specific recommendations for the preservation, restructuring and revitalization of INSTRAW, in keeping with the Secretary-General's reform programme. The Institute deserved the same treatment as other United Nations institutions receiving financial assistance from the regular budget, such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders.

7. **Mr. Kim** Cnang Guk (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that it was a prerequisite for peace, security, development and prosperity to protect and promote women's rights and dignity, and to realize equality in all spheres of life — political, economic, social and cultural. To that end, women and girls must have equal access to education at all levels, which would help to create a social environment for the promotion and protection of their rights. Investment for

the welfare of women should be increased, and in that regard, his delegation welcomed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Developed countries, however, should refrain from attaching preconditions to development assistance.

8. His Government had taken all necessary measures to empower its women to engage freely and equally in political, economic and cultural activities. Soon after liberation, the Government had passed a law on gender equality, and had thereby enshrined equal rights for women in all spheres of social life. The Government was faithful to its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and participated actively in international cooperation for the promotion and protection of women's rights.

9. **Mr. Lamba** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the SADC member States reiterated the urgent need to involve women as participants and beneficiaries in all development programmes. Progress had been made in several areas, including the commitment to allocate 30 per cent of decision-making positions in SADC countries to women, but millions still lived in conditions of abject poverty. Rural populations endured particularly poor living conditions. Growing unemployment, especially among women and youth, emphasized how much effort and resources were needed to lift large numbers of people out of the current unacceptable social and economic situation.

10. The Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session continued to provide the impetus for SADC initiatives aimed at bridging the gender gap and ensuring the advancement of women. Gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development had been embraced as the lead strategy.

11. Most SADC member countries had ratified or acceded to the Convention. The major challenge was to transform the substantive clauses of the Convention into nationally binding legislation. Consistent reporting under the Convention was another area requiring technical and financial assistance.

12. The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, signed in 1997, provided for regional and national mechanisms for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality by 2005. A gender unit had been established in the SADC secretariat to coordinate gender issues at the subregional level. At the national level, all SADC countries had developed gender policies, and reported to the SADC secretariat on progress made. The assistance provided by the Division for the Advancement of Women and by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the millennium development goals had been valuable. The SADC delegations would, however, like to see UNIFEM strengthen programmes for the training of law enforcement officers in human rights education, and in dealing with sexual abuse and violence against women. The elimination of violence against women was a priority of SADC members.

13. HIV/AIDS provided an example of an undesirable trend in gender relations within SADC. It had harmed the gains of women and girls more than those of men, and the increasing number of women infected was forcing many female-headed families into abject poverty. There was an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of health-care systems to deliver basic services to all in an efficient and affordable manner. The health factor was critical in the planning and coordination of poverty eradication and sustainable development strategies. Among other challenges which affected the lives of women and children was the food crisis in six SADC countries, which was placing 14 million people at risk and was worsening faster than predicted. Women's participation in all aspects of sustainable agriculture and food security must be enhanced.

14. SADC believed in the importance of research in policy and programme formulation, and thus recognized the vital role of INSTRAW, which needed adequate funding. It also endorsed the conclusion contained in the Secretary-General's report on trafficking in women and girls (A/57/170), and would welcome the adoption of bilateral and multilateral agreements to ensure the prosecution of traffickers.

15. SADC believed in development that encompassed every individual regardless of gender. While the pace had been slow, indications were that the region was on the road towards the advancement of women and gender equality. It urgently requested its partners for financial backing in the improvement of the status of women.

16. **Ms. Al-Malki** (Qatar) confirmed Qatar's commitment to the advancement of women and to securing their rights, as guaranteed by the Islamic Shariah, with a view to reinforcing their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. It was based on the belief that women were full partners with men in development.

17. The Higher Council for Family Affairs in Qatar had drafted a national strategy for the advancement of women, empowering them and broadening their public involvement, in collaboration with UNIFEM. That strategy had followed a full review of the Qatari woman's situation in all fields, and of all relevant legislation.

18. The Government of Qatar, under the guidance of His Highness the Emir, aimed to build a State based on the rule of law and to broaden popular participation in decision-making. The new Constitution guaranteed the right of all citizens to participate in national affairs, through an elected Parliament, and to run for elective office. In order to raise women's political awareness, an international symposium had recently been organized regarding the role of women in politics and development. A preparatory committee had also been formed to help women participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

19. The State of Qatar had closed the gap between men and women at all educational levels. Currently, women outnumbered men in undergraduate and graduate studies. Women were also encouraged, through favourable State policies, to reach decision-making positions, and were legally given work guarantees and privileges equal to those of their male counterparts.

20. Qatari women participated also in benevolent activities, such as those of the Family Development House, a non-governmental organization for social development and for raising the economic and everyday conditions of low-income families. That entailed training the available workforce and encouraging small and medium-size enterprises that would fulfil local market needs.

21. In preparation for Arab Family Day, to be observed in Qatar in December 2002, measures had been taken to ensure the welfare of families, giving the working woman additional rights that would allow her to fulfil her family duties. Those measures granted her nursing hours, maternity leave, and two years of paid leave in order to care for the children. That was in addition to the retirement law, which preserved the rights of women at retirement, and the civil status law, soon to be promulgated, which would guarantee the rights of women during marriage and after divorce.

22. All forms of violence against women had been rejected religiously, morally and socially, and Qatar had joined the international community in condemning violence against women and the trafficking in women and children. While many societies had known violence against women, the doctrine of Islam, which insisted on respecting the dignity of women, along with laws which considered attacks against women and children criminal, had limited that type of violence in Qatar.

23. Lastly, her delegation expressed great concern for the suffering of Palestinian women and the hardships they were going through in the occupied territories, as they and their family members were subject to daily mistreatment by the Israeli occupation forces. The international community should not be selective in defending women's rights, and should not overlook the Palestinian women whose rights were being violated.

24. **Mr. Aleryani** (Yemen) stated that since the creation of the Republic of Yemen in 1990, the successive governments had attached great importance to the advancement of Yemeni women, amending the Constitution in order to provide equality among all citizens, men and women.

25. The Government endeavoured to empower women and improve their cultural, social, economic and political situation. However, despite the existence of laws that were favourable to women and that would bring justice to them, reality was different. Yemeni women were still suffering from a lack of education and of opportunities to reach decision-making positions. Social traditions still hampered their participation in public life.

26. There had been, however, some progress in the past 10 years. Women were being educated in increasing numbers and were reaching university level. Drop-out rates, especially in elementary schools, were diminishing. Scholarships were offered to low-income women, and female illiteracy was decreasing.

27. The Government had created institutions and associations to serve the development needs of women. Those included a centre for the study of women,

affiliated with the University of Sanaa; a statistics agency, affiliated with the Central Census Bureau; an office for the advancement of working women, under the Ministry of Labour and Professional Training; and a higher council for women's affairs.

28. The Government supported the participation of women in development, and believed that the advancement of women was essential for the development and prosperity of society. Yemeni women participated alongside men in all administrative, political, technical and leadership sectors, reaching nearly one fourth of all participants in the public sectors, and one sixth of all members of political parties. Yemeni women had reached ministerial, parliamentary and ambassadorial positions, and worked as physicians, engineers, researchers and pilots.

29. The Government supported United Nations resolutions calling for the advancement of women, and supported a strategy that would provide them with the same rights as men. It condemned all forms of discrimination and violence against women, including trafficking.

30. Yemeni women's associations expressed great concern about the situation of women in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. Pregnant women were prevented from reaching hospitals and others were hampered from going to work or school. Occupation should end in order for those mistreatments to stop.

31. *Ms. Leyton (Chile), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

32. **Mr. Chew** (Malaysia) noted that, although some progress had been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, unequal relations between men and women and prejudicial attitudes towards women and girls still remained. Women continued to be marginalized from the mainstream of development. More than one billion people in the world, the great majority of them women, lived in unacceptable poverty. Obstacles to progress in that area included lack of resources, debt, the decline in international funding and the unmitigated impact of globalization, particularly in developing countries. More concerted and comprehensive efforts at all levels were urgently needed to address those issues.

33. In 1989, his Government had formulated a national policy on women emphasizing equal partnership between men and women, and development that integrated and benefited women, at the same time ensuring that women were active participants in and contributors to development. His Government continued to support programmes to improve the economic situation of women, particularly in rural areas. Measures had been undertaken to facilitate the involvement of women in business, through measures such as the provision of easy access to capital. It had also been demonstrated that, when included in development programmes, women participated actively as agents for positive change.

34. Recent events in Africa had proved that women had an important role to play in conflict resolution. Their role should also extend to involvement in peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building. His delegation emphasized the importance of strengthening women's role in decision-making so as to prevent armed conflicts from erupting in the first place. He urged all States to ensure full participation by women in decision-making towards sustainable development as well as disaster reduction management at all levels.

35. States should ensure that women were not left behind in the information revolution. Recognizing that information and communication technology could contribute to the empowerment of women and to reducing gender inequalities, his Government had made efforts to improve women's access to such technology, seeking to ensure that all segments of society had access to information and communication technology, particularly computer and Internet facilities.

36. Another area of concern was that of violence against women, a core area to be addressed in the advancement of women. Malaysia was concerned about the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, pornography, prostitution and sex tourism, and urged continued international efforts to eliminate those new forms of slavery. Government agencies in Malaysia, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, had made significant progress in the fight to curb domestic violence. The police had adopted more transparent procedures and were conducting talks on violence against women at educational institutions and government agencies. Malaysia welcomed the contributions of civil society to the advancement of women. Partnerships between Governments and non-governmental organizations in programmes to promote the mainstreaming of women in the economy and

development was a sure way to ensure their advancement and the attainment of gender equality.

37. **Ms. Nze Ngoukou** (Congo) said that the Millennium Declaration had provided a unique opportunity to emphasize the importance of gender equality and women's rights as a development goal. Her Government placed considerable emphasis on women's rights, and in 1982 had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The 2001 Constitution stipulated that all citizens were equal before the law and prohibited all discrimination on such grounds as racial, ethnic or geographical origin, gender, education, language and religion, subject to certain provisions. Women had the same rights as men, and the law guaranteed their advancement and representation in all elected and administrative political posts.

38. Nonetheless, women in rural areas in the Congo were regularly and systematically subjected to discrimination in a number of areas, including education, where school enrolment for girls was considerably lower than that for boys. As for health care, the maternal mortality rate had increased from 1990 onwards, and only 2 per cent of women had access to contraceptives. The role of women in economic development was mostly restricted to their work in agriculture. In urban areas, women worked in difficult conditions and their incomes did not provide them with a decent standard of living. Women and girls were the main victims of discrimination in employment, and the number of female-headed households had increased.

39. Although from the legal standpoint Congolese women had the same rights as men in terms of access to civil service jobs, there were obstacles to their equal representation in that field. Those obstacles were men's lack of interest in women's issues, and the lack of involvement by the majority of Congolese women in their own advancement, since men were considered superior to women by custom; as a result, legal instruments on women's rights tended not to be implemented.

40. The two recent civil wars in the Congo had worsened the situation of women and their place in society. More than 2,000 women and girls had had the courage to bear witness in the presence of the media in Brazzaville to the extensive practice of rape during the conflicts. Many women had been traumatized and many children had been born as a result of that sexual violence, and a study was currently being conducted to assess the extent of that phenomenon in rural areas.

41. Her delegation commended the efforts of the United Nations in the context of its aid to the Congo, particularly with a view to taking greater account of the impact of women in all activities and sectors and to providing places where women could organize, express themselves and contribute to the democratization of public affairs.

42. **Mr. Zeidan** (Lebanon) said that, while its language and culture made it part of the Arab world, Lebanon was a country of great diversity with a mixed Christian and Muslim population and strong Western influences. The population had enjoyed a tradition of tolerance, individual rights and emancipation. Feminist and human rights movements in Lebanon had long been campaigning for improvements in the situation of women at all levels. A great deal had been accomplished but much remained to be done.

43. It had always been said that the country's only real asset was the level of education and culture of its people. School enrolment among girls had constantly grown over the past 25 years. Formerly, many girls had dropped out of school before completing secondary education, but the percentage of girls at secondary school was now equal to that of boys and was tending to increase. The proportion of women students at the university level, about 22 percent in the 1970s, had now risen to 52 percent.

44. Lebanese women had always played an important role in the family, which had enabled them to protect the family unit throughout the years of war and suffering while men were under arms or had emigrated to find work. It was thanks to Lebanese women that the structure of society had survived. In more recent times, social and cultural progress had enabled women to have careers outside the home; the average age of marriage among women had increased to over 27 years. The percentage of women working in the diplomatic service and the judiciary was increasing. However, women still had difficulty obtaining senior decision-making positions, which were still mostly reserved for men. Efforts still needed to be made in order to change attitudes and ensure recognition of the principle of gender equality at all levels and in all senses.

45. The status of women depended upon the legal provisions currently in force, but even more important

was the image that society had of women's role. Lebanese law gave both sexes equal rights in relation to property, access to loans and commercial transactions. However, rural women were ill-informed of their rights. There were still inequalities, particularly in matters of credit and inheritance, and legislative modifications were still needed to ensure complete equality de jure and de facto for women in all aspects of life, and to provide effective and easily accessible legal recourse against all forms of discrimination.

46. Lebanon was a party to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The national committee for Lebanese women had a broad mandate: setting national priorities, issuing recommendations for legislative changes, and raising awareness.

47. The Israeli occupation had worsened the situation of women in all the occupied Arab territories. Defending their personal rights had become a less important duty for women than that of combating the occupation, and they had had to devote their energies to the struggle for survival. To avoid coming under fire from the Israeli army, they had chosen to stay at home, abandoning their employment. Thus, the responsibilities of Palestinian women were limited to their roles as housewives and mothers. They could not travel without being terrorized; even shopping was to be avoided. It was in that context that women such as the activist Leila Khaled and the fighter Hanan Ashrawi had become prominent, playing an essential role in the Middle East peace process. Women who fought for peace were increasingly numerous and their ideas and actions were known throughout the world. Their activities kept hope alive in the exhausted hearts of Palestinians, the hope of achieving the peace of which they had long dreamed.

48. **Mr. Bazel** (Afghanistan) said that during the previous session his delegation had devoted its entire statement to the Committee to the condition of women in the Afghan territories occupied by the alliance between the Taliban and Al-Qa'idah. He was pleased to be able to speak at the current meeting about the new prospects which had opened up for the Afghan people, including girls and women. The Afghan people had resisted the Taliban and their extremist allies heroically, despite the modest means at their disposal. The vital support from the international anti-terrorist coalition led by the United States of America had put an end to the domination of Al-Qa'idah and the Taliban occupation. The Afghan people appreciated the military action by the United States and other friendly countries against the terrorist threat to the entire world.

49. The end of the Taliban was also the end of obscurantism and of the false interpretation of Islam in the name of the so-called Islamic State of Afghanistan. In the territories occupied by the Taliban, women and girls had been subjected to systematic exclusion from education, employment and health care. Women had played an integral part in the peace process which had followed the collapse of the Taliban regime. The Bonn Agreement contained clear provisions relating to women's rights and their participation in the political and social life of the country. Women ministers were now in charge of women's issues and public health, and the Afghan Human Rights Commission was also chaired by a woman. Thousands of Afghan women had resumed their work as civil servants, teachers, judges and lawyers. The school attendance programme launched in March 2002 had enabled more than three million children, including girls, to return to educational institutions. In Kabul, more than 65 per cent of teachers were women and 45 per cent of students were girls. More than 200 women delegates had taken part in the Loya Jirga, which had appointed the transitional President and administration.

50. It must not be forgotten that 85 per cent of the Afghan population lived in the countryside. The situation of women living in both urban and rural areas had deteriorated owing to the 23-year conflict in Afghanistan, and women and children had suffered terribly during that time. Ninety-six percent of Afghan women were illiterate, and the infant and maternal mortality rates were among the highest in the world. Afghanistan was in a better condition than the previous year, but much remained to be done. Sustained support from the entire international community was essential in order to consolidate peace and stability in Afghanistan. Assistance was particularly needed in the areas of education, health and training. The necessary aid must be provided in order to restore the economic and social infrastructure of the country; only then would Afghan women be able fully to enjoy their rights in a prosperous and developed society.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.